

# John Talbot

In Focus  
with  
Carmel Meyer



Well known at Sunday events, distance runner John Talbot joined MAWA around 2010. His story proves that early health difficulties don't need to dictate the course of a sporting life. Now 79, John had Poliomyelitis at age ten, whilst growing up in the north of England. He was unable to exercise but helped his Grandfather who was a backyard gardener and general tinkerer. John says he didn't think of running until he was in his forties.

In 1972 John arrived in Darwin for a working holiday. It was back to the UK in 1974 after travelling within Australia and working in the Pilbara for six months. He had saved enough for a flight to South Africa and travelled down to Cape Town, then around the coast to Durban, on to the Okavango Delta, Botswana, Malawi, and Kenya, to name a few. John married in the UK and returned to Australia with his wife in 1979. Perth suited them just fine. John joked, *If I wanted big city life, I'd go back to London!*

John says his route to running was a circular one. The beach was an early attraction. He purchased a second hand wave ski and became a sit-down surfer, paddling on weekends up and down the coast. One very windy day while helping a fellow paddler put his kayak up on his roof rack, John saw a notice for an Avon Descent kayak training program...*Why not?* he thought. John's first Avon Descent was in 1991 and he went on to do eight in the WWK1 (Wild Water Kayak) class. He also took part, amongst many other events, in the Cameron Descent in Malaysia (developed in 1995 as a sister event to the Avon Descent) and the Liffey Descent in Ireland. John has also participated in National championships in Tasmania (1999) and New South Wales (2000). John says, *During this time I met so many mainly younger people who were doing all sort of sports events who would talk me into "having a go" - cycling, triathlon; a huge learning curve, but fun.*

John's first organised running event was the WA Marathon Club Round the Bridges 10k event in 2000, as a lead up to the City to Surf in August of that year. *No records or bones broken, I just enjoyed joining in the events and gradually gaining confidence for longer events.*

The Half Marathon became a target for John somewhere along the line. He wasn't worried about being first or last, just doing it. From there he did the UK Great North Run in Newcastle (a total of three times), the Thames Meander, Sydney Half, and Half Marathons in Bunbury and the Goldfields. John says the progression to a Marathon was a case of, *I should do one before I'm seventy*. His first marathon was Marathon du Médoc at the age of 68. This event is in France through the vineyards of the Médoc in the Gironde. John reminisces, *Food and wine all the way round; fantastic event, I loved it*. Once the fear/apprehension of the distance was broken, John was keen to do more. And he did - Bunbury: April 2015, Chicago: October 2015, Tokyo: March 2016, Perth: July 2016, London: April 2017, New York: November 2017, Berlin: September 2018. John also ran the marathon at the Perth World Masters Championships in 2016, winning a M70 team gold medal on a very hot November day.

John made the most of multiple holidays to India, running the Cochin Fun Run, Kolkata 10k Trail Run, Jaipur Half Marathon in 2019 and the Mumbai Half in 2020. Despite his phenomenal running catalogue, John says he has avoided most runner's injuries...*Calf issues in early days, torn meniscus in 2007, but mainly ok*.

John hasn't received formal coaching but learned along the way via various social training groups. And he has given back to his sport, volunteering both with MAWA and Claisebrook Cove Parkrun. He has been a regular Parkrunner with a tally of 585 events in 77 locations. John's goal is to hit the 600 mark by the time he turns 80 in June. Go John!

Unfortunately, since his last Great North in 2022, John's ability to run has declined. He has been unable to run continuously, had multiple medical tests and been diagnosed with Post Polio Syndrome. He explains it this way - *The bodily repairs in the recovery from Polio are weak and break down over time, so the nerves firing the muscles aren't working properly. I can continue to walk/run on shorter distances and shall do so while I can*. Heart issues were repaired in 2024, with a new aortic valve and two stents. John reports that a checkup last December showed all is well in that regard.

A look at John's recent results at MAWA Sunday events show that he is still giving it his all, using all that mental strength and can-do attitude that has seen him develop as an athlete with an extraordinary sporting resumé, despite the health issues of his formative years.

A final word from John; *The stories I could tell, (but not put in writing) ...just ask me!*

